

*Interview*

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August 13, 1940

Dr. L. Greeley Brown  
173 Madison Avenue  
Elizabeth, New Jersey

My dear Dr. Brown:

Your letter of July 28 came while I was spending a few days away from the office. On my return I read it carefully and re-read it on subsequent occasions in order to digest its content thoroughly and weigh the arguments you have presented for the point of view you entertain.

Having been in the front line trenches professionally, for a number of years, I am painfully aware of all of the arguments for and against segregated institutions. It has been necessary for me to set up my own code to serve as a guide in the discussion or decision effecting a specific case. I find that in this discussion of a hospital that I must revert to this basic code in order to clarify my own thinking.

While you cite the success of hospitals in St. Louis, Kansas City and Tuskegee, I wish also to call your attention to Chicago, Cleveland, Ohio, New York City, Jersey City, Detroit, Michigan, and even Washington, D. C., as communities where Negro physicians have been integrated in the general set up and are playing their part in the professional life of the community and the public institutions in those communities. I cite these instances to give point to that which is my basic philosophy. Where segregation and separation are the universal pattern in the community effected, I am satisfied that there is much to lose and little to gain to stand pat on a anti-segregational platform. If on the other hand, the community is not one of separation on a universal plane, then I feel assured that we are taking a serious step backward to permit a new effort to set a pattern in that direction. Personally, I feel that the establishment of a Negro city-supported hospital would be as serious a move in a city like Newark as would be the establishment of a separate Negro grade school, high school, public playground, or other public institutions.

While I agree with you that there is a large body of opinion among whites constantly pressing us toward a position of isolation in our own communities, it is my observation as a result of very wide contact with whites all over the north Jersey area that the majority

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of these people, passive though they may be, are inclined to support our bid for complete integration and recognition. Every bit of ground we give is causing this majority group to question the soundness of their idea that we deserve complete recognition, and long ago I arrived at the conclusion that we must preserve the potential support we have in this group, strengthen those ties that for the moment are tenuous, and implement the interest they are willing to show in a more dynamic way if we prove ourselves worthy of such support.

Meantime, I feel that racial institutions, as such, carried on under our own steam and operated by ourselves are very vital in proving to the rest of the world that we have what it takes to justify the dynamic support that we need from the majority of the white group. It is only when we see fit to dismiss our responsibility and call upon the general public to support something for us, that I feel we are stepping out in the wrong direction. All of this means to say that I am, and always have been strongly in support of Community Hospital as it now exists. I could not be true to my own convictions to be a party in any fashion to petitioning the city of Newark to take that institution over as a public hospital. I took exactly that stand when the trade school for colored girls opened, even though I was able to recognize in that instance, as I am in the proposal that you offer, that certain immediate material advantages which accrue to us in such a transition. It is the fear of the more remote, but more certain psychological dangers which would be inevitable, that cause me to feel as strongly as I do.

All of this of course is my own personal position. I shall be more than glad to present your letter to the Interracial Committee at its opening fall session in order that they may discuss it and I will even suggest to them that you be invited in to present any further arguments in behalf of the position you take in your letter.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours,

Harold A. Lett  
Executive Secretary